

Message Text

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ORIGIN ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SAB-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO ALL AMERICAN REPUBLIC DIPLOMATIC POSTS NIACT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY PANAMA NIACT IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 069285

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR/PN

SUBJECT: PANAMA CANAL TREATIES

1. AS REPORTED BY THE MEDIA, THE SENATE PASSED THE
NEUTRALITY TREATY YESTERDAY WITH A VOTE TO SPARE (68-32),
AND BEGINS DEBATE ON THE BASIC TREATY TODAY. WE EXPECT
A VOTE ON THE LATTER TREATY IN APRIL. THE CHANGE THAT
DREW MOST ATTENTION IN THE HOURS BEFORE THE DEBATE WAS
THE SO-CALLED DECONCINI RESERVATION (TO BE THE SUBJECT
OF A SEPARATE MESSAGE) WHICH SPELS OUT THE UNITED STATES
RIGHT TO TAKE UNILATERAL ACTION, INCLUDING THE USE OF
MILITARY FORCE IN PANAMA, AFTER 2000 IF THE CANAL IS
CLOSED FOR ANY REASON.

2. IN COMMENTS TO THE MEDIA SHORTLY AFTER THE VOTE
PRESIDENT CARTER REMARKED "THIS IS A PROMISING STEP TOWARD
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A NEW ERA IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH PANAMA AND ALL OF
LATIN AMERICA." TO REASSURE THE PANAMANIAN PRESIDENT
CARTER SAID EXPLICITLY THAT THE MODIFIED TREATY DOES
NOT GIVE THE UNITED STATES THE RIGHT TO INTERFERE IN
PANAMA'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS.

3. IN PANAMA A PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN APPEARING

ON PANAMANIAN TV AND RADIO ALMOST IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE FAVORABLE VOTE ON THE NEUTRALITY TREATY INDICATED THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS TENTATIVELY ACCEPTED THE TREATY AS APPROVED, DESPITE SOME UNDESIRABLE RESERVATIONS AND OTHER CONDITIONS. THE SPOKESMAN STATED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE STUDYING CAREFULLY THE AMENDMENTS, RESERVATIONS AND UNDERSTANDINGS ADDED BY THE SENATE TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT THEY DO NOT STAIN PANAMA'S HONOR OR ALTER ANY OF THE FUNDAMENTAL OBJECTIVES OF THE NEUTRALITY TREATY.

THE SPOKESMAN NOTED THAT THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT WILL CONTINUE TO REMAIN SILENT UNTIL BOTH TREATIES ARE APPROVED, BUT THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD MAKE AN OFFICIAL STATEMENT ON THE RESERVATIONS AND UNDERSTANDINGS AFTER IT HAD STUDIED THEM. THE SPOKESMAN SUMMED UP AS FOLLOWS: "SO IN PRINCIPLE WE CAN TELL THE PEOPLE THAT THE MAIN OBJECTIVES OF PANAMA REGARDING THE TORRIJOS-CARTER TREATIES HAVE NOT BEEN ALTERED BY THESE RESERVATIONS INTRODUCED BY THE SENATE. IN PRINCIPLE, AND GENERALLY SPEAKING, WE CONSIDER THAT THESE RESERVATIONS ARE FAIRLY PALATABLE SINCE THEY DO NOT AFFECT THE ESSENCE OR CONTENTS OF THE NEUTRALITY TREATY."

4. OUR EMBASSY IN PANAMA REPORTS AS FOLLOWS: "WE ARE GREATLY ENCOURAGED BY THIS EARLY (AND CONSIDERED) RE-CONFIDENTIAL

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ACTION BY TORRIJOS. THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT IS MAKING A NOBLE EFFORT TO SWALLOW THE DECONCINI RESERVATION, WHICH IS MERELY THE BITTEREST OF A NUMBER OF NOT-VERY-APPETIZING RESERVATIONS AND UNDERSTANDINGS. WE MUST NOT ASSUME THAT JUST BECAUSE THEY APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN SWALLOWED, THAT THE PANAMANIAN WILL BE ABLE TO KEEP THEM DOWN. ONCE THE SUBSTANCE OF THE RESERVATIONS IS FULLY UNDERSTOOD HERE, THE OPPOSITION WILL SURELY GO TO WORK TO UNDERMINE BOTH TORRIJOS AND THE TREATIES."

5. WE WILL KEEP YOU ADVISED OF SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS AS THEY OCCUR. VANCE

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